KENNEDY CASE MYSTERY DEATH

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The New Orleans Probe

Mystery Death of 'Kennedy Plot' Man

D.A. Had Planned His Arrest

By George Lardner Jr.
Times-Post Service

New Orleans

A pilot who figured in District Attorney Jim Garrison's investigation of President Kennedy's assassination was found dead in his bed yesterday.

David W. Ferrie, once interrogated as an alleged "getaway pilot" for a Presidential assassin, was discovered dead at 11 a.m. in his home with a sheet pulled up to his chest.

New Orleans authorities are in disagreement over the cause of death.

Orleans Parish coroner Dr. Nicholas J. Chetta said Ferrie died of a ruptured blood vessel at the base of the brain. Garrison called it an apparent suicide.

INTERVIEW

I may have been the last person to see him alive, during a four-hour conversation that ended shortly before 4 a.m. yesterday.

"A president," he told me at one point in the rambling interview, "is no better than anyone else. If I were killed, I'd expect my death to be investigated just as thoroughly."

UPI Telephoto

JIM GARRISON

AP Wirephoto

DAVID W. FERRIE

The district attorney and the man he somehow suspected

It was almost as if he went back upstairs after I left to prove the point.

Garrison declared that his investigators had intended to arrest Ferrie next week in the district attorney's highly publicized investigation of the death of President Kennedy. Garrison has asserted that Mr. Kennedy's murder in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, was the product of a plot hatched in New Orleans.

'IMPORTANT'

Garrison called Ferrie "one of history's most important individuals."

"Evidence developed by our office had long since confirmed that he was involved in events culminating in the assassination of President Kennedy," the district attorney said. He said that he decided yesterday morning to hold off Ferrie's arrest another week.

"Apparently we waited too long," Garrison said. He refused to spell out the charges that might have been lodged against the pilot.

Ferrie told me he felt convinced there was no plot to kill the President, that Lee

See Page 12, Col. 1

D.A.'s Suspect

Mystery Death Of Pilot in 'Kennedy Plot'

From Page 1

Harvey Oswald was a "loner."

A loner himself, Ferrie seemed in good spirits, not like a man about to kill himself.

"Kennedy is dead," he said. "Let's get on with living."

But he also described himself as moody, even, at one point as I recall it, given to manic-depressive moods.

A brown bottle of medicine, tablets apparently, was standing on the worn-down piano in his living room when I left. Garrison said 14 other bottles were found scattered around house. Ferrie was reportedly suffering from emphysema.

It was Ferrie who forced Garrison to acknowledge on Saturday that he was conducting a full-scale investigation of what Garrison called a conspiracy resulting in the Kennedy assassination.

Ferrie told me he was convinced it would turn out to be a "witch hunt."

WIG

Ferrie, a ruddy-faced man in his late 40s with a deep red wig glued on his head and false eyebrows, said: "I was the first one they questioned."

He had been summoned by Garrison's men last November on broadly, the same grounds for which he had been picked up within 72 hours after Mr. Kennedy's assassination.

At that time he had been arrested as a "fugitive from Texas" and questioned about reports that he might have been in Dallas that afternoon, waiting at Love Field with a plane to fly Oswald to safety.

Ferrie said he did leave for Texas with several acquaintances that day — to Galveston and Houston "hunting geese" — but that he never set foot in Dallas.

CAP

Ferrie said he never knew Oswald and had no recollection of ever having met him. Oswald was rumored to have served in Ferrie's Civil Air Patrol unit in New Orleans, but Ferrie said they were in different units.

Ferrie was also rumored to have flown Oswald to Cuba around 1959. He scoffed at the report.

"I've never even been to Cuba," he said. "At the time I was supposed to be flying Oswald to Cuba, I understand he was in the Marine Corps."

Ferrie said he considered "this pre-occupation" with the Kennedy assassination "ghoulish." But his rooms showed that it occupied him day and night.

CLUTTER

Copies of magazine articles on the President's death, books attacking the Warren Commission, even his own mathematical calculations of the path of the assassin's bullets, cluttered the floor.

On Monday, Ferrie turned up at a restaurant to talk to Carlos Bringuier, a Cuban exile who had scuffled with Oswald three years ago on a New Orleans street corner over Oswald's distribution of leaflets of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

Bringuier, who insists that the assassination was a pro-Castro conspiracy, recalled Ferrie's visit with distaste.

"He asked me if I could help him," Bringuier said. "He told me that anyone who thinks there could be a Communist plot behind the Kennedy assassination should go to a psychiatrist."

SPEAKER

Bringuier, who went on the speaking circuit after the assassination with the right-wing organization Christian Crusade, shrugged.

"There was a plot," he insisted, adding that he disagreed with Garrison's declaration earlier in the week that a foreign power was not involved.

Ferrie said he was sure that the FBI had investigated Oswald's activities in New Orleans thoroughly and was now waiting for Garrison to fall on his face. The district attorney said earlier in the week that "arrests will be made, convictions ... obtained."

At a press conference after

Ferrie's death, Garrison expresssed his regret and suggested that the press may have driven Ferrie to take his own life.

MURDER

Pressed on whether he was ruling out murder, however, Garrison told reporters, "I'm not ruling anything out. I don't want to be in the position of being dogmatic."

Ferrie's body was found by a young man police refused to identify. Garrison said the individual had to break into the house to make the discovery.

The district attorney also vowed full speed ahead with his investigation of the Kennedy assassination. He said he had no intention of calling in the FBI. "What would be the purpose in seeking federal aid — to try and delay our progress three more years?

"We've been able to make more progress in three months with a handful of men than they've been able to do in three years with 5000 men."

Garrison insisted that he wasn't trying to play "the dog that has to have its own bone" and added: "Any information the federal government has to give, of course we're glad to get."

But he professed unhappiness with what he said was the "secret" classification stamped on pages in the Warren Commission volumes referring to Ferrie. He said the FBI had stamped them secret and implied that J. Edgar Hoover's men had been less than cooperative in other areas of the investigation as well.

Ferrie had a different story. He said that when he was summoned for questioning last fall, Garrison's men wanted him to track over the ground he had covered with them in 1963, on the ground that the district attorney's office had lost its copy of his initial statement. (At the press conference, Garrison complained specifically that the FBI never gave his office a copy of Ferrie's 1963 statement.)

Ferrie, who had in the past been arrested on morals charges involving young boys, said he did have until recently his own doubts that Oswald was the only assassin.

Alluding to the Garrison investigation that is apparently pursuing many of the points raised by critics of the Warren Commission, Ferrie said, "I feel it's a thesis-proving affair. I think Garrison felt, what could be better than to be a hero on something that's popular."